

are of Hispanic descent. Of the 3.5 million children under 18 living in New York, nearly 1 million are Latino.

While El Día de los Niños recognizes the importance of all children, the holiday also provides an occasion to shed light on the unique challenges currently facing Latino children in America. Every day nationwide, 751 Latino children are born into poverty and 561 Latino high school students drop out of school. In New York, 35.9 percent of Latino children live in poverty and nearly 20 percent of Hispanic youth drop out of high school each year.

We must do better for our children, especially our Latino children. The President's budget fails to provide adequate investments in education that could significantly improve the future of our most vulnerable children. President Bush's fiscal year 2005 budget eliminates the dropout prevention program and even calls them unnecessary despite the fact that over 27 percent of Latinos across the country currently don't graduate from high school. His budget freezes funding for bilingual education and migrant education programs; cuts funding for Head Start, after school programs, and college loan programs; and eliminates Even Start. This budget is devastating to programs designed to help Latinos gain an even footing in education.

That is why I joined my colleagues in the Senate in sending a letter to the Appropriations Committee urging the committee to target funding to meet the needs of our Hispanic children. To strengthen our Nation, we must take steps to ensure that all children growing up in America have access to a quality education. Throughout the remainder of the 108th Congress, I will continue to champion legislative efforts to aid all young Americans and the Latino community so that we can help these children pursue their hopes and dreams. Today, as we celebrate El Día de los Niños I encourage all Americans to stop for a moment and pay tribute to the future of our great country—our Nation's youth.

TRIBUTE TO TOM MEEKER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a fellow Kentuckian and UofL alumnus, Tom Meeker. Tom is the President of Churchill Downs, home of the Kentucky Derby. This Saturday, horse lovers from around the world will watch with anticipation as Tom presides over the 130th Run for the Roses.

In September of 1984, Tom was named President of Churchill Downs. Two decades later he oversees one of horseracings largest operations. His success didn't come easily or without personal struggles. When Tom assumed the reins at Churchill Downs, the 109-year-old racetrack was in need of a facelift. Today, the track is entering the final stage of a \$121 million renovation.

Under Tom's leadership, Churchill Downs Inc. has also expanded its oper-

ations and now owns six tracks in five States, as well as its own simulcast network. And the company continues to give back to the Louisville community through philanthropic donations.

Tom has been described as a hard working, aggressive, loyal and forceful leader. He has had some tangles over the years with the Kentucky General Assembly regarding expanded gambling and other business issues. But these encounters pale in comparison to the personal battle he fought with alcohol. Fifteen years ago he sought help, and returned a month later a changed man.

Churchill Downs is lucky to have Tom Meeker. Under his direction, it has matured and thrived to become the place we all come home to, particularly the first Saturday in May.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the article, "Churchill's Hard Charger; Tom Meeker rebuild the track—and his life" from The Courier-Journal, be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Louisville Courier-Journal, April 24, 2004]

CHURCHILL'S HARD CHARGER; TOM MEEKER REBUILT THE TRACK—AND HIS LIFE (By Marcus Green)

Tom Meeker was a 41-year-old lawyer with little racetrack experience when he took the top job at Churchill Downs in 1984.

The 109-year-old track "was about ready to fall down," said Meeker, who didn't think he'd last too long either.

But in two decades Meeker has built Churchill Downs Inc. into one of the three big players in the sport, along the way eliciting both great praise and sharp criticism.

Some who know Meeker describe him as a visionary, a bold and aggressive executive whose legacy at Churchill might rival that of the legendary Derby promoter Col. Matt Winn.

"If you look at Churchill Downs then and you look at Churchill Downs today, the only similarity is the name, the Twin Spires and the fact that the Kentucky Derby is there," said Gerald Lawrence, the track's former general manager and executive vice president.

"The place has just been completely changed. It's a foresight and a vision that (Meeker) had."

Today Churchill owns six tracks in five states and beams its races live to bettors at tracks, off-track betting parlors and homes across the country.

Despite having one year left in a \$121 million renovation of the flagship track in Louisville, Churchill still has the resources to offer \$45 million to buy the Fair Grounds in New Orleans, one of the last independently owned, top-tier thoroughbred tracks in the country.

In addition, Churchill Downs has emerged as a leading corporate citizen with Meeker at the helm, contributing more than \$7.7 million to charity over the last five years, including \$2 million to the local community.

"Tom is a great leader," said Churchill Downs Inc. board Chairman Carl Pollard. "And I think we have to give him credit—most of the credit, if not all of the credit—for recognizing that the industry was changing and that in order to take advantage of the change in the industry we had to be more than one racetrack."

Meeker, who commanded Marines in Vietnam, has been described as a hard-working, aggressive, loyal and forceful leader.

Meeker volunteers another word.

"'Arrogant' has come up any number of times," he said. "I think that's a function of being action-oriented. I mean, if there's one thing you can't criticize about our team is we do things."

But Meeker said he would not have been able to guide the company's expansion if he didn't get help for his drinking after the 1989 Kentucky Derby.

"The taint that I painted on the company—you know, 'Here is some drunk running the company. What can he do?'—at that point, I kind of figured it would be short-lived before I moved on," Meeker said.

Change, for Meeker, often meant breaking with tradition.

During his first year as president, Meeker rankled some when he raised Derby ticket prices to fund on-track improvements.

He called the track's neighborhood "blighted" and promoted Sunday races to the dismay of area ministers.

And critics note that the same man who now embraces simulcasting was initially opposed to it—a fact Meeker readily admits.

"Change is such a tough taskmaster. It truly is," Meeker said. "You have to have the sense of purpose, conviction and risk-taking to be able to weather some of those storms and believing what you are doing is the right thing."

Most recently, the track's multimillion-dollar renovation has given Churchill a much-needed face-lift—but it also adds mammoth stacks of luxury suites that come close to overshadowing the famed Twin Spires and has left some longtime Derby ticket holders without a view of the race.

The changes have upset some traditionalists.

Meeker argues that replacing the patchwork of clubhouse and grandstand additions that had been bolted on to previous expansions will enhance the track's architectural integrity.

"If we don't move," Meeker said, "we're going to get lost in the wash."

Under his leadership, Churchill also expanded its portfolio by buying other tracks and later formed a separate simulcast network.

"He's taken Churchill Downs from just a facility that was used two days a year: the Oaks and Derby," said trainer John T. Ward Jr., a former Kentucky racing commission member. "... He's continued to promote quality racing in everything he's done, and he understands there's a definite relationship between the racing and the horsemen—even though he's made a few horsemen mad."

Ed Flint, who negotiated with Meeker when he was president of the Kentucky Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association, would partially agree.

"He did some great things for Churchill Downs. He's made a lot of changes out there that have been good for the industry," Flint said. "But at the same time, I think his negotiating tactics and his style have hurt the industry some."

Added Flint: "He had the mentality of a go-get-'em, hard-nosed type of person, and he let that run over into trying to negotiate a lot of things that pertain to a lot of people. You know, racing touches a lot of people—owners, trainers, groomers, backside workers."

Louisville businessman J. David Grissom, a Churchill Downs director since 1979, said Meeker used to be impatient with average or mediocre performance but has become more patient through the years. Still, Grissom said: "He does not suffer fools gladly."

Not overlooked as a priority when Meeker took over 20 years ago was refocusing Churchill as a community player.

"We were not contributing," Meeker said. "We did a modest amount of token contributions to this charity or that charity, but we were not involved in our community at all."

In 2003, Churchill Downs Inc. donated \$424,460 to Louisville philanthropy, bringing the total contributions to \$1.5 million over the last 3 years. The company recently contributed \$125,000 to a new Junior Achievement center in the Russell neighborhood that is expected to teach financial skills and business basics to 24,000 elementary and middle school students each year.

But its generosity didn't help Churchill win friends when it began its support in 1993 for expanded gambling as a way to generate more revenue and boost purses for horsemen.

Bills to expand gambling at racetracks failed to advance in the General Assembly in 2002, 2003 and again in this year's session.

Churchill was a lightning rod during debate on Kentucky House Speaker Pro Tem Larry Clark's casino bill, which stalled in the General Assembly this year. Clark's measure would have put the issue before voters as an amendment to the State constitution.

Clark, D-Okolona, wanted Churchill to locate its casino in downtown Louisville. Meeker said a better location would be the refurbished track or property the company owns at Fourth and Central Avenues.

Rep. Tom Burch, D-Buechel, who praised Meeker's role in building up Churchill Downs, said Meeker's style has agitated some lawmakers during the General Assembly's consideration of additional gambling.

"Tom is very confrontational, and he shows it," Burch said. "Most legislators don't want to have him around."

Burch said legislators are dealing with potential repercussions in their areas of the State, and "I don't think (Meeker) understands that."

But Meeker says he understands there will be friction between a business person who wants to move fast and a legislator who wants to build consensus.

"One of my weakest skills is dealing with the legislative body in Kentucky," he said. "(In) every other jurisdiction we have famous relationships. I talk to governors, speakers, leaders, and we work well together. . . . For whatever reason we haven't been able to achieve a collaborative, open dialogue with our leaders in Frankfort. Why that is I don't know. I'll accept the blame for it."

Uninspired by his first trip to a horse track—a visit to Churchill Downs with his future wife Carol's family in 1962—Meeker had not seemed destined for a career in racing.

Nothing excited me about it," Meeker said, "I mean, I didn't know who to bet or any of that stuff."

Meeker graduated summa cum laude from the University of Louisville School of Law in 1973 and practiced corporate and health-care law as an attorney with Wyatt Tarrant & Combs.

He began going to the track regularly when later serving as understudy to John Tarrant, the longtime lawyer for Churchill Downs, before being named general counsel in 1981.

It was a tumultuous time for the track. Summer racing produced small fields and turned off bettors. There were two separate attempts by others to take over Churchill. Meeker was in the thick of the action, helping the track organize its defense.

"I came to understand," he said, "exactly what the potential of the company was."

Meeker was named interim president following his friend Lynn Stone's resignation. "The deal was; I'd stay out here for three or four months, get some visibility, meet people."

But in the span of two months, Meeker's performance was enough to sway the track's board. He was named to the post permanently on Sept. 28, 1984.

There were some personally embarrassing moments along the way. In a highly publicized incident in 1986, Meeker ejected Kentucky state Sen. Greg Higdon from Churchill's suite during a University of Louisville basketball game.

Meeker thought Higdon was crashing the party. Higdon hadn't identified himself and neither man knew the other, Meeker later apologized.

A new turf course inside the dirt oval, new paddock and Turf Club helped boost Churchill's image. So did a new paint job.

The turf course helped Churchill land the first of its record five Breeders' Cups in 1988. The top four Breeders' Cup crowds—all greater than 70,000—have been in Louisville, including a then-record attendance of 71,237 in 1988.

In just four years, Churchill had made a quick turnaround. By spring of 1989, Churchill had posted nine straight meets with increased betting handle and attendance.

Meeker, however, was starting to get bored. Four years into the job at Churchill Downs, Meeker simply didn't see running a racetrack in his future.

"I just didn't think I could be happy out here for the long haul," he said. "Then things started happening."

Intertrack wagering, or simulcasting, was a new system that allowed horse tracks to televise their races to other tracks and take bets on races run elsewhere.

William King, then-president and general manager of the Louisville Downs harness track on Poplar Level Road, introduced simulcasting in Louisville with broadcasts of races from Turfway Park in Northern Kentucky in 1988. The experiment generated \$8 million wagered at Louisville Downs.

Meeker originally opposed simulcasting, arguing that it could diminish on-track attendance and weaken purses for horsemen. His preference was establishing a network of off-track betting parlors across the state, but he changed his mind after seeing Louisville Downs' results.

Louisville Downs and Churchill Downs wrangled over splitting simulcasting revenue and broadcast dates. The bickering ended when Churchill bought Louisville Downs for \$6 million in 1992.

The purchase ended harness racing in Louisville, but it gave Churchill much-needed barn space and a training facility. A refurbished simulcasting center, which opened later that year at the Louisville Downs site, was the heart of the deal.

"It was state of the art, the big screens and all that stuff," Meeker said. "We were kind of the darling child of the industry. And it was cranking off tons of money. It was doing well, which allowed us then to internally finance some of these other capital improvements."

Simulcasting set the stage for the company's push into the 1990s. But Meeker now believes he might not have seen the growth that followed—buying and developing other tracks and expanding its simulcast business—if he had not gotten help for a drinking problem that threatened to spiral out of control.

Meeker remembers the late Churchill Downs board Chairman Warner L. Jones Jr. as an irascible, hard-nosed man who cursed like a sailor and gave like a saint.

"And he was the one that got me sober—truth be known."

Fifteen years later, Meeker has put his drinking into perspective. He is candid. He said his drinking never spilled over to the office, but he acknowledged that it had to hurt in other ways.

On occasion, Meeker would have a few drinks during Derby Week before heading out to speak to groups. He believed, he said, that he was being eloquent.

The reality was vastly different.

"I was at the cusp of really just falling right off the edge," he said.

It was May 7, 1989, the day after Sunday Silence won the Kentucky Derby. Meeker decided he needed help to conquer his alcohol abuse.

He called Jones, who in turn called his friend Wheelock Whitney, a philanthropist and former co-owner of the National Football League's Minnesota Vikings.

Through Whitney, a thoroughbred owner and breeder whose wife sought treatment for a drinking problem, Jones arranged a place for Meeker at the Hazelden alcohol and drug rehabilitation center in Center City, Minn.

"It was kind of tough in those days (to get in)," Meeker said. "Everybody was drunk. They needed treatment."

When Meeker arrived at the Louisville airport Tuesday morning to fly to Minnesota, Jones was waiting to accompany him. Jones, Meeker recalled, wanted to ensure that Meeker made it to rehab.

Whitney met the two men in Minnesota and drove them to Hazelden. Whitney and Jones carried on a lively conversation in the front seat of the car. Meeker sat in the back, he said, scared half to death.

Soon the three were lost. The Hazelden sign was small, and the car passed it by. When they finally found the clinic, Whitney said Jones tried to cut a deal with Hazelden's president:

"Tom Meeker means a lot to me, and we want to see him get well. And I'll tell you what. If he gets well here, I'm going to give you a new sign out on the road, because that one you got is not what a place like this needs."

Several years after Meeker left Hazelden, Jones made good on his promise.

"Warner did provide a brand new sign out on the highway for Hazelden in honor of Tom Meeker's recovery," Whitney said. "It still stands there today."

Meeker returned to Churchill Downs after a month of treatment with "my head screwed on right."

By the early 1990s, Churchill Downs was poised to grow. In 1993 the company unveiled a four-part business strategy that included increasing Churchill's share of the simulcast market and acquiring additional racetracks.

The company explored the possibility of building a track in Virginia Beach, Va., but that state's racing commission awarded the license to a competing group that later built Colonial Downs.

"It was the first time where we actually in a businesslike, methodical way targeted a development project, and our skill sets were low-level," Meeker said. "We had not done any major acquisitions. We were good operators (but) we didn't have a real strong finance component."

Meanwhile, Churchill set its sights on Indiana. Any pari-mutuel wagering or gambling in Indiana posed a direct threat to Churchill Downs and Kentucky racing.

Churchill financed the development of a thoroughbred and standardbred track in Anderson, Ind., then became majority owner when the license holders defaulted. Hoosier Park, Churchill's first track outside Louisville in the modern era, held its first harness race on Sept. 1, 1994.

"We had our operation up and running in Indiana before Colonial Downs raced their first race," Meeker said. "That's how quick we responded, and many of the things that we learned in Virginia we applied in Indiana."

Indiana has since become a battleground state.

The state's gaming commission granted the first license for riverboat gambling in 1995, paving the way for fierce competition for Kentucky's gambling dollar. And Churchill's monopoly on live racing ended in late 2002 when Indiana Downs in Shelbyville, Ind., opened the state's second pari-mutuel track.

But the maturation of Churchill Downs Inc., came in a string of acquisitions that began in the late 1990s. Starting with Ellis Park in 1998, the company bought Calder Race Course in Miami and Hollywood Park in Inglewood, Calif.

A merger with Arlington Park near Chicago in 2000 ballooned Churchill's portfolio to six racetracks in five states, including three in major U.S. markets.

"It was one of those incredible times in business where you actually invent new ways of doing things on the fly," said John Long, chief operating officer at Churchill Downs Inc., from 1999 to 2003.

Churchill's strategy shifted several years ago, considering acquisitions in places where expanded gambling is likely.

Documents filed this week in a Louisiana bankruptcy court show the company made the highest offer in private talks for the Fair Grounds Race Course in New Orleans.

Churchill still could buy the bankrupt New Orleans track at an upcoming bankruptcy auction, a move that would give it winter racing and a facility soon to install hundreds of slot machines.

Meeker is 60 and his contract will be up for renewal in 2006. He's already made money—his salary this year is \$463,499, he got a \$200,000 bonus last year and his Churchill stock is worth more than \$10 million.

He and his wife have a daughter and two grandchildren. But he jokes when asked when he might retire and shrugs off serious talk of retirement for now.

"I want to make sure that when I leave the company," Meeker said, "that it's left at a time when everything is pointing north."

CONGRATULATING INCLINE HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate Incline High School on its victory in the Nevada "We the People" competition.

This accomplishment reflects not only a lot of hard work by the individual participants but also the strong commitment to academic excellence of all the students, instructors, and administrators of Incline High School.

I am pleased to be able to recognize the individual members of the team on their achievement: Bradley Allured, Jason Beavers, Nicholas Bohn, Jessica Corpuel, Joseph Driver, Alexander Heilig, McKenna Hollingsworth, Joshua Hub, Ansley Kendzioriski, Elisabeth Komito, Ashley Nikkel, Laura Pillsbury, Robert Rappaport, Catherine Serrano, Tira Wickland, and Beate Wolter.

I also note the efforts of their teacher Milton Hyams, their coach Robert Heilig, and their peer tutors: Ashley Hanna, Daniel St. John, and Jonathan Shoop.

I am sure that I speak for the entire Incline High School community in thanking the "We the People" program's district and State coordinators, Dan Wong and Judy Simpson, for their work in helping give the students the opportunity to participate in this great competition.

Created in 1987, "We the People" promotes civic competence and responsibility among our Nation's elementary and secondary students. Its innovative curriculum enhances student understanding of the history, principles, and institutions of American constitutional democracy.

The instructional program culminates in a simulated congressional hearing and a nationwide competitive program for high school students. Attracting the participation of more than 26 million students and 80,000 educators, the "We the People" program has expanded the civic knowledge of our students, cultivated a new generation of leaders, and highlighted the tremendous potential of our Nation's youth.

Please join me in congratulating Incline High School for its commitment to academic excellence, and its victory in the Nevada "We the People" competition.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2003

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. On May 1, 2003, Senator KENNEDY and I introduced the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act, a bill that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society.

On August 8, 2003, in Grand Rapids, MI, an 18-year-old bisexual man was discovered unconscious with his wrists bound in a ditch. Authorities believe that he had been the victim of a vicious sexual attack. The victim survived on a life-support for two weeks before dying of pneumonia-like symptoms.

I believe that Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

NATIONAL TIRE SAFETY WEEK

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I wanted to take the opportunity today to recognize the importance of tire safety during National Tire Safety Week. The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Subcommittee on Competition, Foreign Commerce, and Infrastructure, which I chair, has jurisdiction over the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. As such, I am keenly aware of the devastation caused each year on our Nation's highways due to automobile accidents.

The National Tire Safety Week, created by the Rubber Manufacturers Association, is now in its third year, and one of a number of their public outreach campaigns designed to focus our efforts on a key issue for all of us: tire safety.

Tires are clearly a core component of an automobile and a key aspect to ensuring the safety of the occupant. When you stop to think about it, there is only a small patch of rubber on each tire that meets the road at any given moment. That small patch of rubber is responsible for ensuring the automobile maintains control on the roadway. This function must be maintained no matter what weather conditions exist hot or cold, wet or dry, snowy and icy. Tires are an amazing and highly technical feature of an automobile that is often taken for granted.

Just like changing your oil regularly, tires must also be routinely cared for and inspected in order to maintain their safety. Unfortunately, many drivers unwittingly neglect their tires. That is why National Tire Safety Week provides us all with a crucial reminder to do the simple things to ensure that our tires are safe.

The result of unsafe tires is simply devastating. Tire blowouts and hydroplaning cause a driver to lose control of the vehicle, which careens out of control, often smashing into other vehicles or flipping over. Tragically, just 3 weeks ago in a small farming community in southern Oregon, a family of five ranging in age from 2 years to 60 years old was killed instantly when the rear tire of their van blew out and the van veered into the path of an oncoming pickup truck. The family was on a last minute outing to gather Easter supplies for their church.

We don't yet know why the tire blew out. It could have been underinflated. Or perhaps the tread was wearing low or uneven and it was more easily punctured by a sharp object in the road. The bigger question that we need to address now is, could this accident and tragic loss of life have been avoided? Possibly.

With this in mind, I would like to highlight a small Oregon company, Smart Tread, LLC, who has developed a simple visual tread wear identification system. The Smart Tread proposal advocates for an improved visual identification system that would help consumers better understand when their tires are safe and when they are not. One such approach would use color directly in the tire tread turning yellow and/or red when a tire tread reaches a depth like 2/32 of an inch that is no longer safe and is the legal definition of a bald tire. This system will provide early warnings of a car that is out of alignment or running on overinflated or underinflated tires.

It is my hope that industry and consumers will see the benefit of this tread wear identification system that Smart Tread has developed. We need to continue to improve the safety of tires to prevent unanticipated automobile accidents and deaths. Again, I thank the tire manufacturers for all their efforts and continuing to address this important issue.